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Letter dated 2 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The present letter is being addressed to you in connection with the Quito Agreement announced by the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) on 4 September 2017. In that agreement, the two parties declared that they intended to observe a temporary bilateral ceasefire and that they planned to establish a mechanism involving the Government, ELN, the United Nations and the Catholic Church, with the aim of preventing and reporting any ceasefire violations. The parties continued their talks in Quito to determine the agreement's details and follow-up arrangements, by means including the development of protocols. The ceasefire entered into force on 1 October 2017, and is due to remain in force until the second week of January 2018.

As the Council is aware, I publicly welcomed the announcement of the ceasefire, and authorized my Special Representative for Colombia and Head of the United Nations Mission in Colombia, Mr. Jean Arnault, to conduct consultations with all the parties concerned in order to determine how the United Nations could support this process.

On 29 September 2017, in a joint communiqué, the parties requested that the Security Council authorize the United Nations Verification Mission established by resolution 2366 (2017) to fulfil the tasks entrusted to the United Nations in the context of the monitoring and verification mechanism comprised of representatives of the Armed Forces of Colombia, ELN, the United Nations and the Catholic Church. The parties indicated that the mechanism would verify compliance with the ceasefire, prevent incidents through close coordination between the parties, ensure timely reaction to incidents and undertake independent verification of allegations of non-compliance. It would have a presence at national, regional and local levels. They agreed that the United Nations, as the international component of the mechanism, would coordinate the mechanism's work, resolve any disagreements between the parties and make recommendations accordingly. It would also be responsible for reporting the results of the verification to the mechanism and to the public. The joint communiqué was formally transmitted to the United Nations on 29 September 2017 by means of a letter addressed by the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations to the President of the Security Council and to me.

After giving due consideration to this request, and having taken account of the information that has emerged from the consultations with the parties held by my Special Representative, I wish to convey to the Council my positive assessment of the viability and desirability of the role proposed for the United Nations. You will

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find below an explanation of the ways in which the Mission could fulfil the tasks anticipated and of the conditions needed for it to be able to do so.

First, although the ceasefire is nationwide, the parties agreed that the mechanism would focus solely on areas of particular relevance for the implementation of the ceasefire, namely twenty locations matching the Catholic dioceses, and a further thirteen locations. While the United Nations Verification Mission is already deployed in some of these locations, its presence will be required in a number of new locations. At each of these locations, the Mission could deploy a small team comprising one civilian staff member and two international observers. At locations where no United Nations offices exist, staff would work from available hotel or other facilities to make it possible to minimize costs.

Second, the involvement of the United Nations in the monitoring and verification of the ceasefire would rely on the staffing and logistical resources of the Verification Mission without affecting the fulfilment of the tasks already entrusted to the Mission under resolution 2366 (2017). In particular, civilian staffing needs would be met from within the Verification Mission's existing strength, although temporary deployment of a limited number of staff might be necessary. Fulfilling the task of liaising with the Colombian Armed Forces and ELN to avoid conflicting movements and prevent armed clashes would require 70 additional international observers. It should be remembered that repatriation of the majority of the observers of the United Nations Mission in Colombia, which completed its mandate on 25 September, is ongoing. While Council approval and the consent of observer contributing countries is pending, these additional observers, who have experience with the former tripartite ceasefire monitoring mechanism, could be retained, thereby ensuring immediate operational readiness.

Third, the Verification Mission is in the process of taking over the assets and resources of the recently concluded Mission in Colombia, and is therefore in a position to meet the short-term logistical needs deriving from the additional tasks. Such logistical support would include vehicles, radios, computers, offices and access to an in-country United Nations air transport capability. Moreover, staff and observers carrying out the additional tasks would be able to rely on the field coordination, operational, security and analytical capabilities that the Verification Mission already has in place, both in Bogota and in the regions. Under these circumstances, the Verification Mission could initiate operations immediately, while leaving open the possibility of requesting additional support should the situation so require.

The circumstances under which the request from the Government of Colombia and ELN is being made are very different from those under which the Security Council considered the request of the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) in January 2016. Never before has a ceasefire been agreed between the Government of Colombia and ELN. The temporary nature of this ceasefire shows that the process between the Government and ELN stands at a different stage than was the case with the peace process between the Government and FARC-EP a year and a half ago. It represents an opportunity for the international community to instil further momentum into the positive dynamics that have been emerging in the past few months. A further strengthening of the ceasefire now, and establishing conditions conducive to its extension next year, would enhance the positive environment for the ongoing negotiations in Quito. Such efforts could also alleviate the humanitarian situation for the communities most affected by the conflict. In this respect, they represent an important complement to what the Verification Mission is seeking to achieve through its verification of commitments to the security and protection of communities in conflict-affected areas.

I therefore recommend that the Council respond positively to the joint request of the Government of Colombia and ELN by authorizing the Verification Mission in Colombia to undertake the tasks outlined above and reflected in the communiqué of 29 September 2017, and by increasing its strength by 70 international observers for the duration of this function. I shall be reporting to the Council on the verification of the ceasefire in the context of the reporting cycle that it has already established for the Verification Mission. In the event that the parties later request a continuation of these tasks beyond the currently envisioned timeframe, the Council's authorization will be sought.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**